

Article

Recovery of an Abandoned Singular Infrastructure as a Key Factor for Regional Sustainable Development; A Study Case: “El Caminito del Rey” [“The King’s Little Path”]

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Abstract: Although the realm of sustainable development has been sharply associated with energy savings and a decrease in contamination, the concept deserves a much more comprehensive approach. Sustainable development, as the only respectful and safe way to progress, involves—besides the mentioned rational use of energy and resources—a broad variety of economic, technical, cultural, and behavioral issues. In this context, the total or partial recovery of abandoned singular infrastructure facilities for alternative uses (leisure time activities for human welfare) is to be considered an original, interesting, and efficient approach. In this research, the so-called “El Caminito del Rey” [The King’s Little Path] will be studied as a paradigmatic model of successful achievement. The path is located in Málaga, South of Spain, and was originally built to provide access to a hydroelectric power plant. Due to the construction of new routes, the track and walkways were progressively abandoned. The recovery enterprise was conceived in the framework of circular economy-based planning and with full respect to environmental requirements. The facts and figures that will be presented and analyzed will show that when the project is thoroughly designed and carefully implemented, the rehabilitation of obsolete infrastructure facilities located in natural spaces is suitable, feasible, and profitable. Prudent and rational use of these assets for alternative purposes (human welfare through rural tourism and open-air activities) may be fruitful not only in economic terms but also in environmental, cultural, and social ones. The main objective of the current work is to demonstrate that obsolete abandoned facilities can be rehabilitated into worthwhile amenities that may turn into key factors for the sustainable development of determined rural areas. Moreover, the “El Caminito del Rey” experience could represent a model for similar development projects.

Keywords: sustainable development; regional development; human welfare; natural spaces; leisure time; abandoned infrastructure; tourism



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1. Introduction

The so-called “El Caminito del Rey”, located in the Province of Málaga (South of Spain), is an infrastructure facility built at the beginning of the 20th century (Figure 1) that fell into disuse and became obsolete and useless. The path was built to facilitate the movement of personnel between the Gaitanejo dam and the hydroelectric power plant. In 1905, the work was completed and the path began to be used. However, it was not till 1921 that the official inauguration ceremony took place under the presidency of H.M. King Alfonso XIII (the current name of the site derives from this event).

In the sixties, after several years of use and due to the opening of better routes, the complex of tracks and walkways was progressively abandoned. At that time, the need for its original use disappeared. However, the beauty of the surroundings and the singularity of the route—between cliffs and gorges—became an irresistible attraction for adventurers who love risk and nature. A growing and uncontrolled flow of hikers, trekkers, and

climbers began to visit the place, which due to neglect and lack of maintenance became a dangerous spot. In the last third of the 20th century, several accidents of different severity were recorded until finally, in 1999, the first fatality occurred. The following year, 2000, was even worse as three more adventurers lost their lives when they fell into the void. In these circumstances, the authorities made the decision to close the access through controlled blasting. However, despite the closure, lovers of extreme risk continued to visit the place, accessing the gorge through a dangerous “Via Ferrata”.

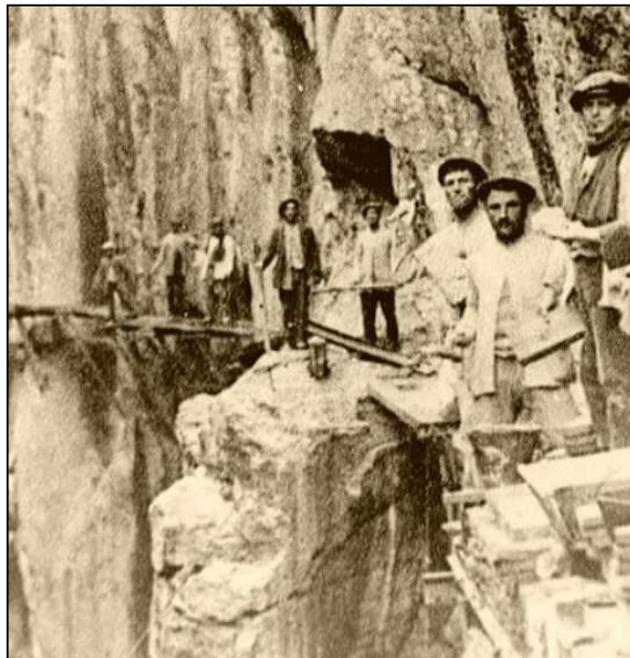


Figure 1. Original “El Caminito del Rey” work started in 1904.

At this point, at the beginning of the 21st century, the situation was disappointing due to two negative factors. First, a place of great attraction for lovers of nature and active tourism was lost, and second, the likelihood of accidents persisted as the place continued to be visited by risk-loving climbers and hikers. In this context, the rehabilitation idea emerged. The initiative was very well received and immediately began to gain strength. In 2006, the provincial authorities decided to accept the challenge of carrying out an ambitious rehabilitation project. The infrastructure should be recovered for tourist uses, following the paradigm of sustainable development in accordance with the wide perspective of “Brundtland” [1].

On 28 March 2015, after several years of engineering design and construction work, the so-called “El Caminito del Rey” [The Little King’s Path] was opened to the public for tourist purposes. During the opening ceremony, the President of the Provincial Council stated:

“El Caminito del Rey is incorporated into the province as a main asset recognized worldwide, and a fundamental tourist, environmental and economic claim. Its annual impact is expected to be around 20 million euros and to generate more than 180 stable jobs” [2].

Several months later, on 25 September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously approved the A/RES/70/1 Resolution “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. The first paragraph of the document states as follows:

“This Agenda is a plan of action for people, planet, and prosperity. It also seeks to strengthen universal peace in larger freedom. We recognize that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development” [3].

Finally, at the end of the year, on 26–27 November 2015, the World Summit on Sustainable Tourism was held in Vitoria (Spain). The purpose of the meeting was to discuss and update the “Charter for Sustainable Tourism” [4] in light of the goals established in the abovementioned resolution (2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development). Among the most relevant statements, the following sentences are to be pointed out:

“Tourism, if well managed, is a main driver towards preserving today’s treasures for tomorrow’s generations, ensuring the protection and integrity of our common heritage, both tangible and intangible; [...] Tourism is a cross-cutting activity that can contribute to the fight against poverty, the protection of nature and the environment and the promotion of sustainable development” [5].

Eight years after the transformation of “El Caminito del Rey” into a tourist attraction, with periods of very different activity (including the forced total closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic), it is time to review its achievements. In this framework, the purpose of this research is to study this singular case from an environmental, cultural, and sociological perspective in order to respond to the following question:

Is it feasible and worthwhile to invest in the recovery of obsolete and abandoned infrastructure facilities for alternative uses?

The increasing interest in the so-called blue-green infrastructure facilities [6], urban blue spaces [7], and some other similar projects [8–11], which are different but complementary to this one, as well as in their excellent degree of implementation, fully comparable with “El Caminito del Rey”, make us think that it is time to implement a decided policy on different conceptions of infrastructure facilities even if they have different nature and utilities.

In the next sections, it will be demonstrated that abandoned facilities, such as “El Caminito del Rey”, can be rehabilitated into worthwhile amenities, which may turn into a key factor for the sustainable development of determined rural areas.

2. Materials and Methods

In this section, we will present some considerations about our methodological approach and research materials.

2.1. Methodological Approach

Our research refers to questions and phenomena of a sociological nature whose ontology, in principle, recommends a qualitative methodological approach. However, the matter is not as simple, and in some cases, we are going to apply quantitative techniques (statistical analysis) to fine-tune our interpretative work, depending on whose data and results we will be able to use. In short, we are going to use a somewhat heterogeneous methodology with different approaches, techniques, and tools: mostly qualitative but with significant quantitative support. In line with this option, we can quote Professor Eva María Olmedo (University of Granada, Granada, Spain) who maintains that “*there are various tendencies and currents that seek coexistence and reconciliation of both positions (quantitative-qualitative) in a new approach based on the coexistence of divergent methods and schools of thought*” [12].

In the realm of experimental sciences, positivist methodologies allow—in most cases—to obtain conclusive results based on studies carried out within controlled environments (the so-called laboratory conditions). The research activities, through the use of quantitative tools, focus on identifying casual relationships and, when possible, their explanatory reasons; the results usually consist of the formulation of laws, axioms, and paradigms. However, this is not possible when social phenomena are concerned, and this is the reason why the level of ambition must be different. In the social sciences, a result is to be considered valid if through the combined application of various methodological resources, plausible, compatible, and concomitant conclusions are reached. This is the essence of triangulation, a method that will allow us to validate results (research findings) by combining approaches and crossing data from various sources through the coordinated application of interpretative tactics, techniques, and procedures of different kinds.

The combination of methods and tools is usually the most common and advisable option. Professors Blasco and Vegas (Global Security International Institute, New York, NY, USA) also express themselves in this sense:

“Qualitative constitutes a field of research that intersects disciplines, areas, and objects of study [...] The focus of qualitative research is multi-methodological. The use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to ensure a thorough understanding of the phenomenon in question. It must be considered that triangulation is a validation alternative” [13].

In fact, the nature of our research discourages the application of positivist paradigms based on a cold collection of data and measurements or on sanitized, quasi-mechanistic verification of causes and effects. For this reason, we will rely on triangulation—an imperfect but sufficient method—to validate certain results for which, due to their intricate ontology, the empirical-analytical approach cannot be used.

2.2. Research Materials

The available literature on the subject is really very limited (not a single scientific article about the subject has been found). This is the reason why this research is mainly based on the study of primary sources of various kinds. The materials used are heterogeneous in nature and can be classified into the following categories.

2.2.1. Official Documents

Resolutions, reports, declarations, and other analog documents issued by different organizations and institutions, such as the United Nations General Assembly and the United Nations World Tourism Organization.

2.2.2. Media

Pieces of news and press releases published in the media.

2.2.3. Books

As already stated, there is very scant literature on the subject; however, we have had the opportunity to have access to an extraordinarily significant publication: *“Recuperación del Caminito del Rey”* [Recovery of the King’s little path] by Luis Machuca Santa-Cruz (architect and author of the project) [14].

2.2.4. Statistics

Some demographic and employment statistics will be collected and analyzed to assess the impact of the project on the surrounding area. The statistical analysis will be developed according to the following scheme:

Starting hypothesis. The recovery of *“El Caminito del Rey”* has had a significant socioeconomic impact on the surrounding area.

Data. The official demographic and employment statistics of the municipalities located in the area of influence will be used. These data will be collected, aggregated, and analyzed to determine patterns and trends over the ten-year period 2011–2020 (this time window covers the five years before and after the opening).

Presentation. The data will be displayed in graphs (bar charts) to show the chronological distribution of figures, paying special attention to the evolution before and after 2015 (the opening year of *“El Caminito del Rey”* as a tourist attraction).

Validation. The hypothesis will be tested to find if there is any correlation between *“El Caminito del Rey”* activity and the demographic and employment trends in the municipalities of the area of influence.

2.2.5. Interviews

Personal interviews with whom must be considered the father of the project: Luis Machuca Santa-Cruz, architect and author of the *“El Caminito del Rey”* rehabilitation master plan.

3. Results and Discussion

The most significant results and their discussion will be presented in separate sections in accordance with the following outline.

- 2030 Agenda: The framework.
- “El Caminito del Rey”: The project.
- Agenda vs. Project: The conclusions.

3.1. 2030 Agenda: The Framework

The 2030 Agenda encourages human beings “to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path [and with this aim establishes] 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets” [3]. In this section, we will expose several considerations on some related approaches and initiatives that have been receiving attention in the field of sustainable development.

3.1.1. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The United Nations Organization has defined the 17 SDGs as integrated, indivisible, global in nature, and of universal application. The SDGs, as stated in the UN Resolution A/RES/70/1 [3], constitute the core content of the 2030 Agenda and the framework for our final analysis and the basis for our conclusions.

3.1.2. Related Approaches and Initiatives

One of the main concerns included in the 2030 Agenda is environmental respect, and in the spirit of this aspiration, the document acknowledges and asserts the principles claimed in the “Rio Declaration on Environment and Development” [15].

The “Rio Declaration”, adopted during the conference held in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) on 4–12 June 1992, establishes 27 principles with the aim to preserve the integrity of the global environmental and developmental system. Moreover, this document expressly reaffirms the validity of the “Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment” adopted during the conference held in Stockholm (Sweden) on 5–16 June 1972.

This veteran, but still very valid, declaration includes a recommendation with an expressed mention of the tourism sector. The reference was introduced at the request of the Italian delegation that proposed the insertion of the following amendment: «*activities including those concerning the economic, sociological and tourism sectors*» [16]. The proposal was accepted, and in the section “Educational, Informational, Social and Cultural aspects of environmental issues”, Recommendation 96 includes paragraph “d”:

“(d) Consideration of the formation of groups of experts in environmental disciplines and activities, including those concerning the economic, sociological, tourist and other sectors, in order to facilitate the exchange of experience between countries which have similar environmental conditions and comparable levels of development” [16].

Three years after the Rio Declaration, on 27–28 April 1995, the first World Conference on Sustainable Tourism took place in Lanzarote (Canary Islands, Spain). The conference was held under the auspices of a group of extremely relevant organizations and institutions, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the European Commission (EC).

As a result of the meetings and discussions, the “Charter for Sustainable Tourism” came to light with the aim of integrating environmental respect and sustainability in the planning and operation of the tourist industry:

“Tourism development shall be based on criteria of sustainability, which means that it must be ecologically bearable in the long term, as well as economically viable, and ethically and socially equitable for local communities, [should] be integrated with the natural,

cultural and human environment [and] must consider its effects on the cultural heritage and traditional elements, activities and dynamics of each local community” [4].

Twenty years later, on 26–27 November 2015, a second “World Conference on Sustainable Tourism” was held in Vitoria (Spain). On this occasion, the meeting was timely and necessary in order to review and update the twenty-year-old “Charter” in the new framework established by the 2030 Agenda and its sustainable development goals.

This conference saw the birth of a new document called “*Charter for Sustainable Tourism + 20*”. It was not a simple matter of bureaucratic review and updating, but it was the perfect opportunity to debate “*tourism’s full potential to bring benefits to local communities, support green growth and economies, foster innovation, safeguard cultural and natural heritage, and protect the environment*” [5].

3.2. “El Caminito del Rey”: The Project

This singular spot is in the South of Spain, Andalusia autonomous community, Malaga province, Gaitanes region (Figure 2).

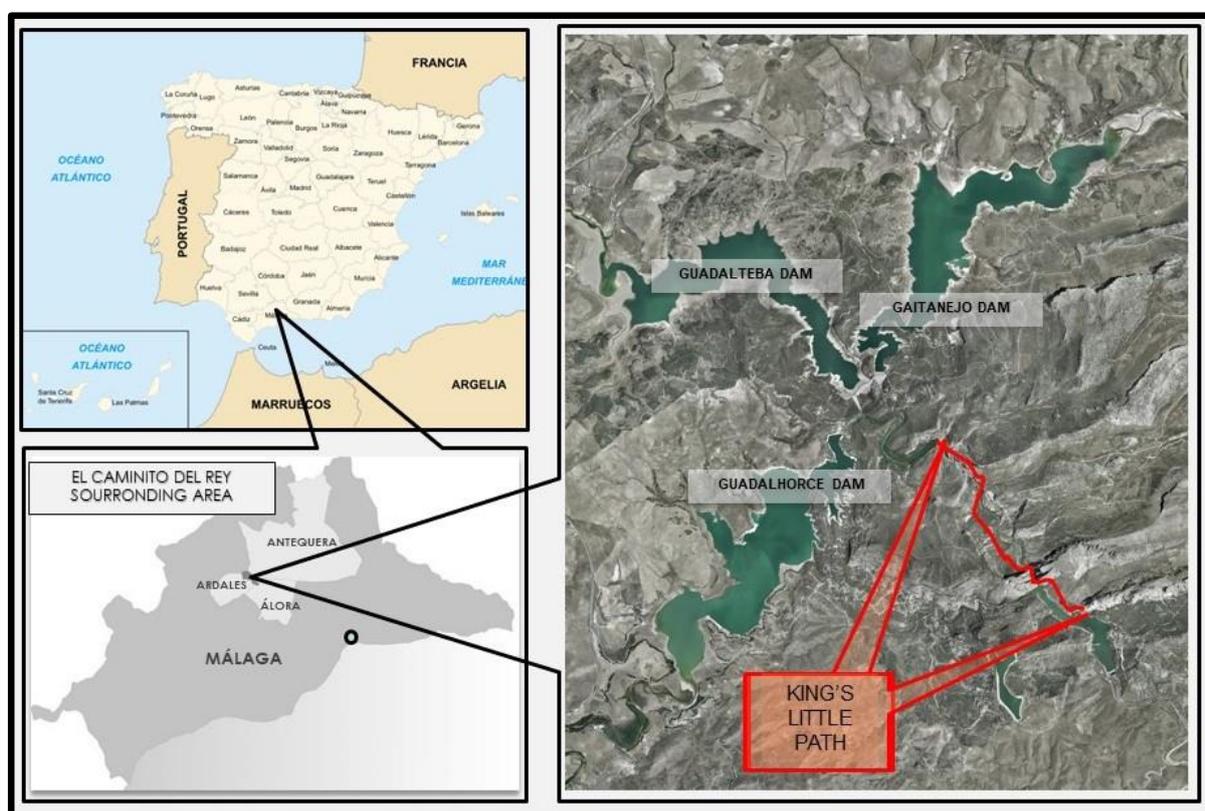


Figure 2. “El Caminito del Rey” geographical location (Málaga, Spain).

The path was built to facilitate the movement of workers between the Gaitanejo dam and the hydroelectric power plant. In 1905, the work was completed and the path was operational. After more than fifty years of intense use, in the sixties, the mountain path was progressively abandoned due to the construction of new and better routes. The recovery idea arose at the beginning of the current century, and the architect who was commissioned for the project described the place as follows:

““El Caminito del Rey” runs over a natural and protected space with substantial and obvious values and dramatic views, such as those of the Gaitanes Gorge (Desfiladero de los Gaitanes Natural Beauty Spot). This is an extraordinary nature site of geomorphological interest, a singular place, the most amazing landscape that we can find in Europe” [14].

3.2.1. The Recovery

To give a first and brief general description of the recovery project, there is nothing better than quoting its author again:

“It summarizes all the different disciplines that the knowledge of architecture requires. We are talking about an environmental project [...] This restoration is not only significant as a tourist attraction but also involves historical reivindication and the Gaitanes’ heritage” [14].

The project was an ambitious challenge due to its complexity and scope (Figure 3). Based on a comprehensive approach, it addresses a wide variety of different issues. Among the most important goals, we must highlight the following:

- Environmental. Preserve the original natural landscape and balance in the ecological system.
- Cultural. Maintain and value the memory of this unique industrial archaeological site.
- Human. Lay the foundations for efficient management with the dual objective of satisfying the needs of visitors while promoting local sustainable development.

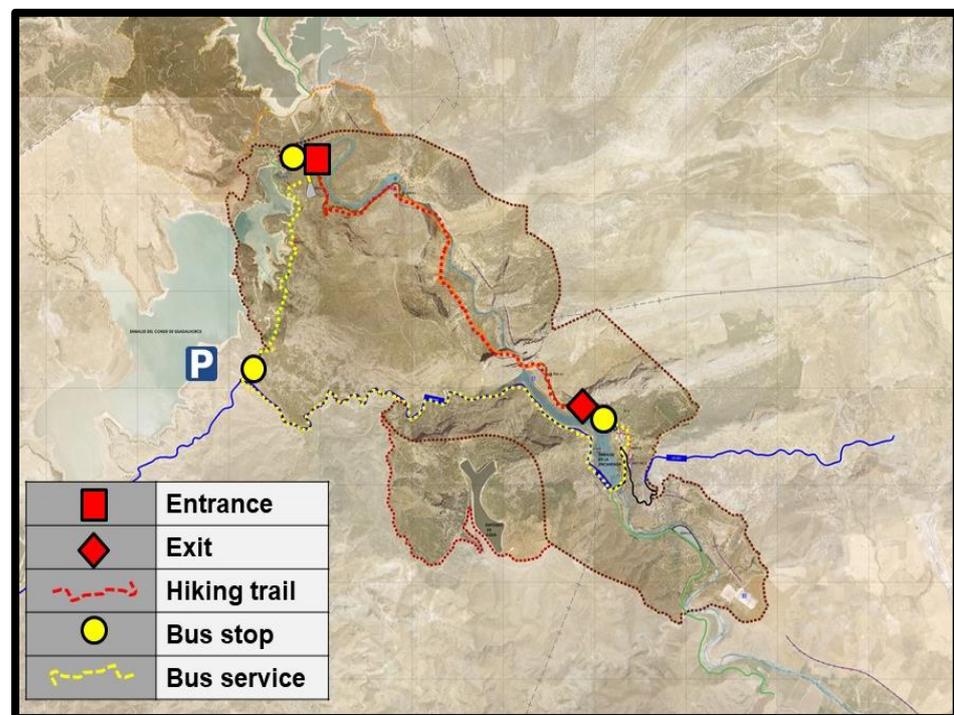


Figure 3. “El Caminito del Rey” layout.

Environmental

The most important concern during the conception of the project was to cause the least possible impact on the environment. This issue was considered and tackled from two perspectives: substance and form.

As for the substance, the project was conceived and developed taking into deep consideration the unique ecological value and natural beauty of the surroundings rich in wildlife, both plant and animal. The concern to safeguard the ecological balance was such that the area was divided into eight autonomous environmental units. Each of these units was the subject of a specific study by which an individualized treatment—based on the particular characteristics of each ecosystem—would be applied.

Regarding the formal aspects, the autonomous community of Andalusia, in accordance with Article 57.1 of the Statute of Autonomy, has exclusive competence in matters of environmental quality and promotion of the appropriate instruments to make economic activity compatible with optimal sustainable standards (provisions included in Articles

13.1, 20, 21 and 28.1 of the abovementioned Statute of Autonomy). To carry out this legal compliance, the project was submitted to the control and supervision of the competent authorities. Prior to start-up (including preparations that may have environmental implications), the project needed to get the so-called Unified Environmental Authorization (UEA), regulated by Decree 356/2010, of 3 August 2010. This mandatory procedure integrates the environmental impact assessment and the different requirements and authorizations into a single resolution. “*El Caminito del Rey*” got its UEA (issued as AAU/MA/25/11) in which it is concluded that «*the project is environmentally viable*».

Cultural

The environment of “*El Caminito del Rey*” has an unquestionable historical value. Two types of differentiated goods can be distinguished: the settlements established before the construction of the infrastructure and the infrastructure itself.

The first interesting vestiges date from the Jurassic period: found marine fossils indicate that the area was part of a seabed. In the region, samples of rock art were found in the “*Ardales cave*”, which proves the existence of Neolithic settlements and certifies the presence of human beings since time immemorial. Moreover, there are several valuable scenarios reminiscent of the Muslim presence in Spain. One of them is Bobastro, the ruins of an ancient town from the 9th century where Omar Ben Hafsun established the capital of his domains until he was defeated by the Emir of Córdoba Abderraman III. The Turón castle is also worth mentioning—a Nazarí fortress built by Muhammad V of Granada to defend his kingdom borders against Christian raids.

Second, the infrastructure itself has an incalculable value as a challenging work of engineering. The original layout included boardwalks anchored to the rock and masonry pathways with beams, brackets, and corbels that formed the foundations of a solid brick vault, topped with a plastered mortar platform. The corbels and brackets were embedded in the rock and fixed to the beams with screws and tied with wires. The parapets were also made of masonry completed with a metal railing between each two pilasters. In the 21st-century project, the original layout was fully respected, avoiding demolition and new construction. Where possible, the original path was repaired, although in some sectors it was necessary to build entirely new sections; but even in these stretches, the remains of the original setup were preserved as reminders of the effort that this great work represented.

Human

From the very beginning, the Málaga Provincial Council paid very special attention to the human implications of the enterprise. The council issued a framework document called the “*Responsible Tourism Policy*” that included and endorsed the principles and objectives of the “*World Summit on Sustainable Development 2015*”, the “*Conference of Parties (COP 21) of the Paris Climate Change Conference*”, and the “*World Charter for Sustainable Tourism + 20*”. Regarding the management of the site and its facilities, the document constitutes a formal commitment to comply with BIOSPHERE standards.

The “*Responsible Tourism Policy*” came to light on 19 June 2017, and an updated version was issued on 22 March 2022. This last and current policy confirms the clear intention and firm engagement to steadily improve all sectors of sustainability: social, economic, and environmental, as well as customer satisfaction. Considering the above, “*El Caminito del Rey*” is committed to the following:

- *Promote good environmental practices in the setting.*
- *Improve the knowledge of all personnel about their role in sociocultural and security management.*
- *Promote and participate in actions to value the cultural and natural heritage of the area.*
- *Enhance the positive impact of “El Caminito del Rey” on the local population and minimize the negative impacts that it may cause.*
- *Guarantee the safety conditions of visitors.*
- *Report both internally and externally on environmental progress and actions.*

- *Fight against sexual exploitation or any other form of commercial exploitation and harassment, particularly of children, adolescents, women, and minorities.*
- *Work to make facilities accessible, to the feasible extent" [17].*

It is worth mentioning that “*El Caminito del Rey*” pays very particular attention to education. That is the reason why there is a special offer for schools and other kinds of educational centers; this specific tour is organized in small groups (no more than 15 students), with each group accompanied by a guide who provides the tour with educational goals. The experience constitutes the gateway to a large number of contents, including water cycles, hydrological systems, geological formations, birds, flora and vegetation, and even the history of the region. The guided tour is an opportunity that allows students to transfer the knowledge acquired in the classroom to the “real” field.

3.2.1.4. Socioeconomic Impact

“*El Caminito del Rey*” was opened as a tourist attraction in 2015 and—like the rest of the world—was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic that paralyzed the normal course of all kinds of activities. On 14 March 2020, due to the extremely serious sanitary situation, the state of alarm was decreed in Spain, and “*El Caminito del Rey*” was closed to the public. After several months of confinement, on 21 June 2020, the end of the state of alarm was declared. As of that date, there were several attempts to reopen the facilities but always with limitations in terms of a number of visitors and routes. It was not until February 2023 that “*El Caminito del Rey*” recovered its full operational capacity. For this reason, the facts and figures of the 2020–2022 triennium should not be considered conclusive for the purposes of this study. That is why the impact on the surrounding area is to be evaluated with the latest relevant data, those registered in 2019 (the last year in which the site worked normally as a tourist asset).

The press of the time collected the results of the report with comments such as the one transcribed below:

“The weight of the Caminito del Rey in Málaga and, in a particularly appreciable way, in its most direct geographical environment, continues to grow year after year. The transformation of this spectacular environmental spot and its conversion into one of the great attractions of the province is generating an unquestionable economic and tourist impact” [18].

Business

On February 2020, the Málaga Provincial Council issued a report which, by comparing the data from the years 2017 and 2019, evaluated the economic impact that “*El Caminito del Rey*” was having on the region. The direct impact on the regional economy was estimated at EUR 23.27 million, 37.4% more than in 2017. This value would rise to EUR 44.3 million if the indirect and induced production was added.

The official statistics transferred by “*Hermanos Campano*”, the company in charge of commercial management, confirmed a growing trend in the arrival of ecotourists. In 2017, the number of visitors was 304,500, while in 2019, the number rose to 328,000 (growth rate: 7.7%). In this area, the room for improvement is very small because the admission policy restricts the daily offer to 1100 tickets. The average attendance in 2019 was 1068.72 tickets/day (close to 96% of its total capacity).

According to surveys carried out by the tourist analysis and intelligence area of Tourism and Planning Costa del Sol, the average expenditure of visitors has registered a significant increase. In the case of daytime visitors, the variation has moved from EUR 28.17 per day in 2017 to EUR 33.39 in 2019 (growth rate: 18.5%). In the case of hikers who spend the night at local accommodations, the expenditure has gone from EUR 72.18 in 2017 to EUR 78.81 in 2019 (growth rate: 9.2%).

Due to the expanding demand, accommodation offers have registered unprecedented growth. At the beginning of 2017, there were only 210 tourist lodgments, and in 2019, the number rose to 474 (growth rate: 126%). These 474 establishments offered a total number

of 5660 beds. This represented 1.4% of the establishments and 1.6% of the beds in Málaga province. These figures must be considered very relevant if we consider that Málaga has a huge range of beach accommodations in its well-known “Costa del Sol”. Thus, if the seaside is excluded, “*El Caminito del Rey*” lodgment facilities represented 10.1% of the establishments and 13.6% of the beds in inland areas.

Employment

The repercussions of the project have also been noticeable in employment. At this point, the report concludes that all the activity around the site is fostering employment. In 2017, 382 new jobs (214 direct + 160 indirect) were linked with the business; in 2019, there were even better data—the number was 533 jobs (305 direct + 228 indirect, growth rate: 39.5%).

The positive impact is felt throughout the region as reflected in the official statistics of the State Employment Public Service [19]. The aggregated figures of unemployed people in the municipalities of the region (Álora, Antequera, and Ardales) and the corresponding trends are presented in Figure 4.

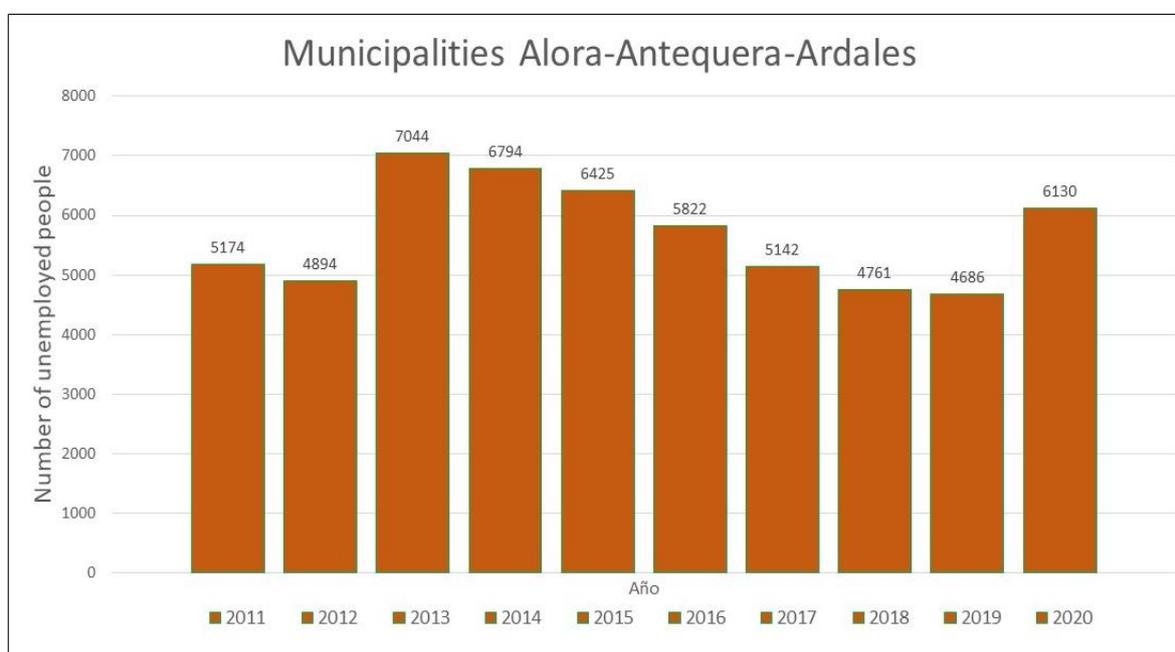


Figure 4. Unemployment statistics in the region (2011–2020).

The figure presents the number of unemployed people over a ten-year term (2011–2020). At the beginning of the period, the data show an upward trend, registering a maximum of 7044 unemployed in 2013. However, in 2014 (the year in which the recovery work began) the trend was reversed, following a downward line to a minimum of 4686 in 2019. The atypical increase in 2020 cannot be considered significant as economic activity suffered a global paralysis due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Demographics

The demography has also been positively affected by the activity derived from the opening of “*El Caminito del Rey*”. The municipalities of the area—like other rural regions—were suffering a slow but inexorable process of depopulation. The recovery of “*El Caminito del Rey*” as a tourist attraction seems to have revitalized economic activity or, at least, alleviated the exodus of the population that seems to be stabilizing.

Official data from the National Statistics Institute [20] confirm this trend. The aggregate figures of inhabitants in the municipalities of the region (Álora, Antequera, and Ardales) are shown in Figure 5.

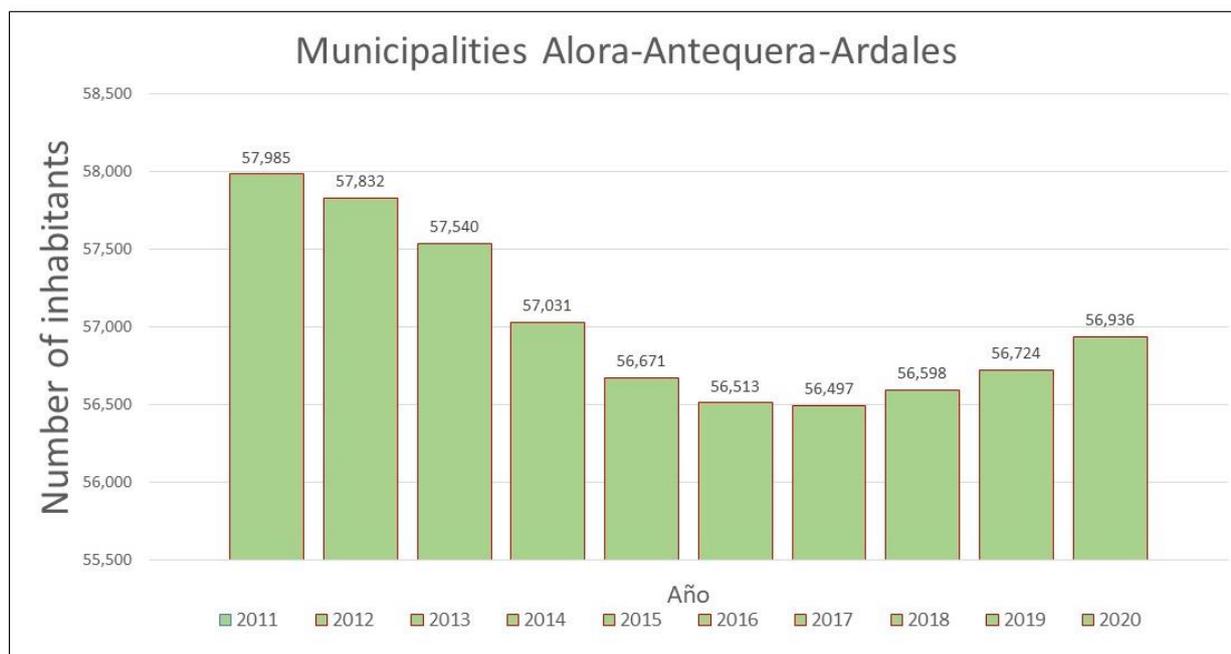


Figure 5. Population statistics in the region (2011–2020).

The figure presents the number of inhabitants in a ten-year interval (2011–2020). In the first half (2011–2015) of the overall period, the graph shows a pessimistic panorama with a negative trend bound for depopulation, but in 2016 (one year after the opening of “*El Caminito del Rey*”), the situation stabilized and reversed, blueprinting a hopeful ascending line that may to the recovery of a good part of the lost population.

3.3. Agenda vs. Project: The Conclusions

In this section, a series of conclusions will be enunciated with the purpose of demonstrating to what degree “*El Caminito del Rey*” can be considered an achievement and progress within the framework of the sustainable development paradigm. To do this, the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda will be used as departure points, and each SDG will be evaluated to verify to what extent the recovery project has contributed to its fulfillment. In order to systematize the evaluation, the conclusions will be presented in Table 1 below, where the following acronyms will be used: CdR for “*Caminito del Rey*”, and RTP for “*Responsible Tourism Policy*”. Finally, to facilitate the direct intuitive understanding, the following color code will be used:

- Blue: No impact.
- Red: Big negative impact.
- Orange: Moderate negative impact.
- Yellow: Moderate positive impact.
- Green: Big positive impact.

In the first case, “blue”, no additional comment will be made since that color means that the project has nothing to do with the SDG under evaluation. In the other four options—“red”, “orange”, “yellow” and “green”—some brief arguments will be provided with the aim of justifying the given color.

In short, it can be concluded that the balance is highly positive. As the 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals are concerned, “*El Caminito del Rey*” (current aspect shown in Figure 6) has a negative impact on none of them. On the contrary, it has a very positive impact on seven (1, 3, 4, 8, 9, 11, and 15), a moderate positive impact on two (2, 5), and a neutral impact on eight (6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17) categories.

Table 1. Impact of the recovery of “El Caminito del Rey” on each sustainable development goal.

SDG Evaluation	
1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere	CdR is, in its essence, a project specifically conceived in the framework of sustainable development for the equitable generation and distribution of wealth.
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture	CdR has influenced the reversal of the trend toward depopulation of the surrounding rural areas and indirectly influenced the reactivation of agricultural work.
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages	CdR’s main goal is to promote a healthy life and human welfare through the execution of sportive outdoor activities.
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all	CDR’s “RTP” expressly includes the commitment to “promote and participate in actions to value the cultural and natural heritage of the area”; the commitment is carried out through a special program for educational centers.
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls	CDR’s “RTP” expressly includes the commitment to “fight against sexual exploitation or any other form of commercial exploitation and harassment, particularly of children, adolescents, women, and minorities”.
6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all	No comment
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all	No comment
8. Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all	The data show that in a few years, the CdR has become an important driver—perhaps the main one—of the local economy and a generator of wealth and employment.
9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation	CdR is a genuinely innovative project that through the recovery of an obsolete infrastructure is improving the sustainable development in the region.
10. Reduce inequality within and among countries	No comment
11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable	CdR is having a very significant impact on the villages of the region, stopping depopulation, bringing prosperity, and creating new opportunities for local communities.
12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns	No comment
13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts	No comment
14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development	No comment
15. Protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss	CdR is, at its core, an environmental challenge, an obsolete and abandoned facility that has become a tourist attraction of singular beauty, which promotes knowledge and respect for nature and healthy life.
16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels	No comment
17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development	No comment



Figure 6. “El Caminito del Rey”, an environmental challenge and sustainable development asset.

The project, no doubt, should be considered a model for future similar developments.

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